



Homeless Issues in Montana: Helping All Students Succeed



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Disclaimer

There are many amazing, supportive, healthy families who are experiencing homelessness. These are people who work hard every day to provide for their families. These are parents who are using all of their assets to make life better for their children.

We have the utmost respect for these families, and recognize that our job is to help them and their children succeed.



The Basics of the McKinney-Vento Act – Assuring Compliance with Federal Law

Heather Denny

State Coordinator for Homeless Education



What is the McKinney-Vento Act?

- Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
- Sec. 721 (1) Each State educational agency shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.

What is the definition of homelessness under McKinney-Vento?

- Any family or youth who lacks a fixed, adequate, and regular nighttime residence
- A public or private temporary shelter (domestic violence, transitional housing, family shelter, youth shelter, etc.)
- Living with another family because you cannot afford your own housing
- Living in a hotel/motel because you cannot afford your own housing
- Camping out in a tent or RV
- Children awaiting permanent foster care placement, or family reunification
- Living in a car, park, public place, abandoned building, bus station, or similar location
- Living in substandard housing (no electricity or running water)

Relevant federal laws and Supreme Court decisions

- **Runaway and Homeless Youth Act** – Runaway Youth are considered homeless unaccompanied youth and should be provided the same services as other homeless children. All children have the right to an education.
- **Plyler v. Doe, U.S. Supreme Court** – guarantees educational rights of undocumented children. Decision was upheld by a federal appeals court in regard to legal action taken against the state of Alabama.
- **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)** – ICWA only applies in cases where a court is determining guardianship of a child. American Indian children living with tribal members who are not their legal guardians may be considered homeless.

Are there state laws in Montana which provide additional protections to homeless children?

- MCA 20-5-201. Admittance of a child to school – “...shall assign and admit a child who is homeless”
- MCA 20-5-503. Caretaker relative educational authorization affidavit – allows a relative to make educational decisions for a child
- MCA 20-1-213. Transfer of school records – records must be transferred within 5 days, records cannot be held for fines or fees

How many homeless students in grades K-12 have been identified in Montana?

School Year	Systems Reporting	Total # identified
2010-11	32	1507
2011-12	43	1762
2012-13	61	2271

These numbers reflect increasing compliance with the law, not an increase in the overall number of homeless students in the state.

Most of these students are Montanans and are from their local communities, not students who have come into our state seeking services.

Why are families homeless?

- Working poor – minimum wage job/seasonal work/part-time
- Unemployment – job loss, injury/illness
- Lack of affordable housing
- Family change – divorce/separation, death
- Domestic violence – physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional
- Drug or alcohol use or abuse.

Why are unaccompanied youth homeless?

- Family financial difficulty – older child told to leave
- Family change – divorce/separation, death
- Domestic violence – physical, sexual, psychological/emotional
- Problems with parents or siblings.
- Problems with the partner of a biological parent, or with the children of the partner.
- Drug or alcohol use or abuse.
- Sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Pregnancy.

Why is it important to identify homeless students?

- All districts are **required** to identify and provide basic services to homeless students under NCLB, Title X, Part C.
- Title I of the NCLB **requires** all districts to provide Title I services to qualifying homeless students, including homeless students enrolled in non-Title I schools.
- Homeless students are a sub-group of the free/reduced lunch population that is most likely to fail standardized testing and to drop out.
- Identifying homeless students allows teachers to provide appropriate classroom interventions.
- Identifying homeless students allows school counselors, nurses, school nutrition staff, and others to provide holistic supports which encourage academic success.
- Districts can apply for federal funds to support homeless students.

The Reality of Family Homelessness

- Lack of structure, routine, stability
- Trauma – domestic violence, child abuse, community violence
- Loss – home, pets, toys, family members, friends
- Lack of access to food or healthy food
- Lack of health care (medical, dental, mental)
- Inappropriate living conditions (no play space, no sleep space, overcrowded, unhealthy, over-stimulation or under-stimulation)
- Stressed attachments to caregivers
- Invisibility
- Poor parenting skills – unrealistic expectations of child's developmental abilities, neglect, abuse

The effect of homelessness on school readiness

- Children who have been homeless or have been at risk of homelessness between the ages of one and five are at greatest risk for aggressive and delinquent behaviors compared to their stably housed peers.
- These same children also show high rates of social withdrawal, and anxiety or depression. They may also exhibit a higher frequency of withdrawal, shyness, separation anxiety, attention disorder, flat affect, and hoarding of food, toys, or other items.
- These children also exhibit difficulties with attention, particularly the ability to focus on learning activities and to self-regulate behavior
- Homelessness is also associated with lower cognitive and language skills.
- All data from *Profiles of Risk: School Readiness*. Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness www.ICPHusa.org

How does poverty/homelessness affect the brains of children?

- Children in poverty experience higher rates of stress
- They are more likely to experience DISTRESS – more stress, more intense stress, longer lasting stress, and possess fewer coping skills
- Stress causes the release of cortisol
- Too much cortisol causes:
 - Brain damage
 - Poor social skills
 - Low verbal skills
 - Memory impairment
 - Aggression
 - Impulsiveness
 - Anxiety
 - Dissociation (daydreaming or zoning out)

The effects of neglect on children

- Neglected children show diminished electrical activity in their brains
- They struggle to recognize different emotions in others
- Exhibit decreased brain metabolism and poorer connections between different areas of the brain
- Disrupts the way the brain develops and processes information, increasing risk for attentional, emotional, cognitive and behavioral disorders later in life
- Compromises their ability to cope with adversity
- Physical neglect leads to abnormal physical development and an impaired immune system
- More likely to have cognitive problems, academic delays, deficits in executive function, and attention regulation.

The effects of neglect on children, cont.

- They have smaller body size and impaired gross motor skills and coordination
- Greater risks for emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal relationship difficulties
- More likely to become overly dependent on their teachers for support and nurturance
- Engage in fewer interactions with their peers
- Deficiencies in social skills and peer relationships that persist into adolescence
- Reduced enthusiasm, confidence, and assertiveness when completing problem solving tasks
- Greater risk for committing violent crimes or being diagnosed with a antisocial personality disorders

What are school districts required to provide to a family/student who is homeless?

- Districts must remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth.
- Students are guaranteed the right to immediate enrollment while records are obtained.
- Students qualify for free lunch/breakfast.
- Students may receive transportation services from their temporary residence to the school in which they are enrolled.
- Students may stay in the school in which they are enrolled for the remainder of the school year if it is in the best interest of the child.
- Students are eligible to receive additional tutoring through Title I.
- The student is guaranteed equal access to all programs including, but not limited to; Gifted Education, Indian Education, Title I, and Special Education.
- The student is guaranteed equal access to extra-curricular activities including, but not limited to; student government, honor societies, clubs, band, choir, and athletics.

What services does the Liaison provide to families and students?

- The Liaison should serve as an entry point into a broader world of service provision.
- The Liaison acts as an advocate for families and students.
- The Liaison connects students to school based services such as mentors, tutors, after-school programs, mental health, etc.
- The Liaison may also make referrals to community agencies who specialize in assisting homeless and low-income families with employment, food, shelter, and other basic needs.
- The Liaison may assist with transportation of parents to school meetings for IEPs, parent-teacher conferences, or other meetings.
- The Liaison may provide direct academic assistance for homeless students based on their educational needs.
- The Liaison participates in a number of community agency meetings, committees, and boards as an advocate for homeless families and students.
- The Liaison works with community agencies to develop programs to meet the needs of homeless families and students.

Working with Homeless Families and Youth

- Be willing to “meet them where they are at”
- Be empathetic, not sympathetic
- Focus on strengths and assets
- Be open and honest about what you will and will not do
- Recognize that drug use and abuse is a coping skill
- Be aware of the challenges of living/growing up in “survival mode”
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Be aware that youth and adults who have engaged in “survival sex” may have difficulties forming appropriate relationships

How can my district apply for McKinney-Vento competitive grant funds?

- Current grantees are Belgrade/Bozeman, Billings, Browning, Evergreen/Kalispell, Great Falls, Helena, Missoula, and Sidney.
- The McKinney-Vento grant is available through e-grants and can be accessed by all Authorized Representatives.
- Districts, or consortia, must have identified a minimum of 40 homeless students in grades PK-12 in AIM.
- To apply, districts must have:
 - A plan to identify homeless students, including community outreach
 - A program to serve homeless students, including collaborative partners
 - Program must include IEFA components
 - Matching funds equal to 35% of requested MV funds

Contact Heather Denny at hdenny@mt.gov or (406) 444-2036 for more information regarding the grant application and use of funds.

How to Find and Identify Homeless Students in Your Community

Lee Houle
Great Falls Public Schools



Identifying Homeless Students and Families

- Locate the office of the liaison in a school building (near the school counselors if possible)
- Educate school personnel about “what to look for”
- Make contact with community agencies that provide services to homeless and low income families
 - Rescue Mission
 - Office of Public Assistance
 - Food Bank

My office is located at Paris Gibson Alternative High School. There are 18 identified homeless students at this school as of 4/15/13. There are 251 homeless students identified in AIM in the Great Falls school district.



This is the Rescue Mission in Great Falls. This is the men's side, the Chapel and also the dining room where the residents eat breakfast . They also serve lunch and dinner. Many of our students and families get help from them.



These are the staff members at the Rescue Mission/Haven of Hope. They keep me informed about new students and families that enter the shelter. Onita is the one who the families and I have to get letters from stating they are full. The letters are presented to the Office of Public Assistance in hopes of obtaining emergency housing.



Denise Juneau, Superintendent
www.opi.mt.gov

I take families to the Office of Public Assistance when the Rescue Mission is full and they have nowhere else to stay. They are sometimes able to get a motel paid for. The length of stay varies.



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The guys from the Food Bank are very good to work with. The Food Bank has an atmosphere much like the Seattle Fish Market, with much humor and kind attention to detail.



I use the old truck to deliver groceries from the Food Bank. It will sometimes get a smile out of the families I work with.



This is one of the parents with a daughter in grade school who was able to get a rental house. St. Vincent DePaul donated furniture that we hauled.

This is my old work horse, Rex. He hauls donated furniture from private donors, the Emily Center and St.Vincent DePaul. All I have to do is put a little gas in him.



Finding Homeless Unaccompanied Youth

- Homeless unaccompanied youth often have a “network” of friends and adult helpers
- Once you gain their trust they will start coming out of the woodwork
- One youth may be 18 and legally housed, but they will often share housing with many other “couch surfing” youth
- It’s important to not judge living conditions. Youth are often doing the best that they can.
- Complaining to landlords about conditions may bring negative attention and cause youth to lose housing. Advocate with caution.

This is the apartment of a student who is paying rent with his Social Security Disability funds. He has several other students living with him. The apartment is severely overcrowded and cluttered. The school helps with food from the Food Bank. His living conditions are similar to a scene from an old Dustin Hoffman, John Voight movie called Midnight Cowboy.



This is one of the places where you might find homeless unaccompanied youth. This is under the 10th avenue bridge here in Great Falls. A student from CM Russell High School lived here for three months. He maintained good grades the whole time he was here.



One of my parents was able to get her prescription filled with donations from a private donor. I took them there and waited and took some pictures of a typical Great Falls Wal-Mart day. Notice there aren't any characters like you see in the outrageous pictures that are in cyber space.



This is a joint art project between one of the homeless students and myself. It's a sculpture of a hand holding a diploma in Victorious Warrior Style, with the message that out of extreme adversity and less than perfect conditions students succeed.



This is Molly one of my three dogs. She's in here for a little comic relief. She gets tired of my granddaughter packing her around and hides in the stuffed toys, using a trick she may have learned from watching ET.



Creating an Effective Homeless Program – Collaborating with School and Community Partners

Sue Runkle
Billings Public Schools



Starting Out

- Educate Yourself
 - NAEHCY webinars & training materials
 - Conferences
 - Site visits
- Educate the School Staff
- Educate the Community

Starting Out

- Remember that every district's program will look differently
 - Base it upon the homeless student's needs within the district
 - Base it upon district and community resources
 - Start out with small, achievable goals
 - Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day!

Staff Awareness Training

- Secretaries/registrars
- Counselors
- Administrative team
- Nurses
- Teachers & paraprofessionals
- Transportation/bus drivers
- School nutrition/cafeteria workers

Collaborations Within District

- Title I
- Transportation
- Title VII director/staff
- Migrant Program
- School based mental health services (AWARE)
- Special Education director/staff
- School Nutrition
- Needy Student Fund
- After school programs
- Extracurricular activities (athletics/music/FFA/clubs)

Food Service

- Homeless students automatically qualify for free school meals
 - List of students provided to school food service manager with liaison signature certifying that the students qualify
 - SD2 protocol – how we do it

Transportation

- School buses, regular & SPED
- Cab
- Fuel only cards
- Individual contract
- MET passes (city bus)

Community Awareness

- Presentations:
 - Church groups
 - Civic Groups (Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.)
 - University Classes – Education, social work, etc.
 - Sororities/Fraternities
 - Special Interest Groups
 - School Board
 - Media
- Posters/brochures
- Liaison business cards

Outside Collaborations

- Local homeless committee
 - Continuum of Care
 - Project Homeless Connect/Point in Time Count
- Housing Authority (HUD)
- Assistance with heat/energy bills (LIHEAP)
- Healthcare (County Health Dept., Healthcare for Homeless, etc.)
- Faith based (IHN, Family Promise, etc.)
- Government services (SNAP, WIC, TANF, SSI/SSDI)
- Tribal services

Outside Collaborations

- Veteran's Services
- Mental Health (HUB, Rimrock Foundation)
- Drug/alcohol abuse counseling
- Child Care Connections
- Local restaurants (food vouchers)
- Local businesses (WalMart, Target, thrift stores, etc.)
- Universities/community colleges (Financial aid officers)
- Head Start

Outside Collaborations

- Emergency shelters (Homeless, domestic violence)
- Nonprofits (Family Service, Inc., Salvation Army)
- Local agencies that serve youth (Tumbleweed, Youth Connections, THRIVE, etc.)
- Mentoring Programs (Big Brothers/Big Sisters)
- Food Bank
 - Backpack meal program
- United Way

Resources

- School supplies
 - Supply drives
 - Feed the Children Backpacks
 - Local retailers (ie mini grants from WalMart/Target, etc.)
 - Church groups
 - Referrals to nonprofits

Where can I get more information about McKinney-Vento, homelessness, and poverty?

- The National Center for Homeless Education: <http://center.serve.org/nche/>
- The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHYC): <http://www.naehcy.org/>
- The National Center for Children in Poverty: <http://www.nccp.org>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child: <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>
- Montana Kid's Count: www.montanakidscount.org
- OPI's Homeless Education website
http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/SchoolPrograms/index.html?gpm=1_8#gpm1_7
- MSU's Extension Service compiles a Poverty Report Card for Montana
<http://www.montana.edu/extensionecon/poverty.html>
- County health rankings and other data related to health outcomes.
<http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>